

A Taste of Muncie's Music

An Honors Thesis (TCOM 433)

by

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Abstract

Music is one of the most popular forms of entertainment today with millions upon millions of albums being sold throughout the world every year. While excellent musicianship is necessary and generally the most highly praised aspect of any album, good production value is also of the utmost importance. Without it, even the best musician would sound like garbage. It was my goal to bring good production value to some incredibly talented local musicians. Over the course of this semester, I recorded and mixed songs for three groups: Bri Schrage, Reggaenomics, and BloodCrusher, using Ball State's recording studios in the Letterman Building. The result is a five-song EP (short album) that will allow the groups to market themselves to different live music venues and potentially even record labels.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr. Stan Sollars for advising me through this project. His guidance, patience, and wisdom were instrumental to me in the completion of this long journey.

I would also like to thank Bri Schrage, Tyler Harris, Melanie Blevins, Brian Walter, and Maci Hayes for lending their musical talents to me for this project. Their hard work over numerous long nights in the studio was simply incredible and I can't thank them enough for sharing their talents.

Last, and certainly not least, I would like to thank Abby Gerhart, a fellow Ball State Honors College student, who put me in contact with the musicians when I was in need.

Artist's Statement

When I first decided to record this EP, I was a bit overwhelmed by the task I was about to undertake. As an audio production student, I had previously only worked with audio for film; this was going to be a completely different experience. I did have prior experience performing and listening to a wide variety of music though, so I hoped that this experience would help me through my production, and it absolutely did.

The first band that I reached out to was Apathy Wizards, a self-described “folk punk” band. At first they seemed interested in the project and we talked for multiple weeks about it, but as time went on they revealed to me that they did not have enough music to record. I would be lying if I said that I wasn’t disheartened by this news. With only two months of the semester left, I was afraid that I would not be able to find a band. I reached out to my followers on Twitter asking if they knew any groups and my friend Abby Gerhart almost immediately tweeted back with two potentials: Bri Schrage and Tyler Harris.

It was decided that I would record three songs for Bri and two for Tyler. After getting approval for this route from my advisor, Stan Sollars, I moved forward with the preproduction process. When recording audio for film, typically only one or two microphones are used in the studio. However, when recording a musical group, many more are required, as each different instrument gets its own microphone and some instruments, like drums, get multiple. It is a much bigger production and this was probably the most overwhelming part for me. Thankfully, Stan was incredibly helpful in this process and assisted me every step of the way.

First up to record was Bri. She plays a lot of lighter, acoustic-guitar driven music, which was a bit of a challenge to record because stylistically, it needs to sound as clean as possible. Unfortunately, we had to do numerous takes of each song, as it seemed her guitarist, Melanie, was a bit nervous to be recorded. However, we were able to make it through and recorded her songs over a total of three sessions. They are the first songs featured on the EP.

Next up was Tyler, who had two different songs he wanted to record. One was for his reggae band called Smithian Mission and the second was for his metal band called BloodCrusher, who plays what they like to call “troll metal.” BloodCrusher provided an additional challenge to their session, as their vocalist screams a lot of her lyrics. Luckily, Stan had experience with this and offered me a good microphone to use for her as well as instructions on how to use the compressor in the studio to ensure that her voice would not clip or distort the microphone.

The first song on the EP is “City,” which was written by Bri and Melanie, and features acoustic guitar, drums, and vocals from both writers. In my mix of the song, I worked especially hard to balance the vocals with the guitar, letting the vocals take precedence. The guitar has a nice, warm sound to it, which I feel complements the softer vocals nicely, giving the song a more intimate feeling. The drums are at a much lower volume in this song compared to the other instruments, as I did not want to feature them too much. They serve as accents to round out the overall sound.

Next up on the EP is "By Your Side," written by Bri. I decided to place it second because I really liked the transition: "City" fades out gradually and leaves the listener feeling a bit down and then the first few notes from "By Your Side" pick the mood right back up. This song is more upbeat than "City," so I featured the drums much more prominently, letting them drive it along at a quick pace. "By Your Side" is definitely the most "feel-good" song on the EP, and I believe the drums enhance this feeling. It is my hope that listeners feel the urge to get up and dance or at least sway their shoulders along to this song.

The third song on the EP is "Collapse," the final song written by Bri. It is definitely the simplest song that we recorded, as it only features vocals and a keyboard. This simplicity is quite appropriate for the lyrical content of the song, as it is the most melancholy-filled work on the EP. Without many distracting instruments, the listener is able to focus more on the lyrics and contemplate them. Bri's vocal performance was superb, in my opinion. She really portrayed the somber nature of the lyrics in an appropriate manner.

Fourth up is "The Ballad of the Fed," a reggae song by Smithian Mission. I was quite pleased with the transition to this song as well because "Collapse" ends on the note A# and "The Ballad of the Fed" begins on almost the exact same note. This was not planned whatsoever, but it worked out perfectly. The lyrics of the song cover the history of the Federal Reserve and give the song the potential to serve as an educational tool for future students, which I am very happy about. This song was a lot of fun to mix and I especially like the distortion that I added to the guitar track, which gives it more of that nice reggae/rock feel.

The final song on the EP (and my personal favorite) is “Guardian Spider” by BloodCrusher. This song describes the battle between an army of spiders, led by the Guardian Spider, and a horde of centipedes, led by the Centipede Queen. At the beginning of the song, the vocals come from the narrator and are balanced in the center of the speakers. However, further into the song, the Guardian Spider and the Centipede Queen begin to talk to each other. For these parts, I put more of the spider’s voice in the right speaker and the centipede’s in the left. I felt that this was an appropriate way to differentiate between the two characters throughout the song. As I mentioned before, this song was much more challenging to record because of the screamed vocals, but I couldn’t be happier with the results. We layered multiple screams together with each verse, so what may sound like one voice is actually numerous. I feel that this will give the listener the sense that he or she is actually listening to an army of spiders screaming through the speakers.

Overall, I am incredibly pleased with this EP. It was definitely the most challenging and time-consuming task that I undertook while studying here at Ball State. Of course, this is appropriate, given that it is my capstone project for the TCOM program. Throughout the recording and mixing processes, I learned numerous invaluable and incredibly useful skills, which I will use in my future career as an audio mixer.